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SPORTING AUSTRALIANS

INTRODUCTION

Australia has long been regarded as a sporting nation. Its performance compared with other countries in elite sports competitions, such as the Commonwealth and Olympic games, is testimony to the high profile given to sport in Australia's culture. In the most recent Commonwealth Games (Kuala Lumpur, 1998), Australia won the most medals. Australia also ranked among the leading nations in the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta (USA), where it finished with the fifth highest number of medals won. Moreover, of the top ten nations, Australia and Cuba won the most medals per head of population (2.3 medals per million people) - followed by Germany (0.8) and France (0.6).^{1,2}

Underpinning these successes are high levels of participation among schoolchildren and adults in a wide variety of sporting and physical activities. Because of the health benefits a physically active lifestyle promotes, this is encouraged for all age groups as a matter of public policy. A national framework for participation in physical activity, known as Active Australia, was endorsed by the Commonwealth Government in 1996. Active Australia has the aim of encouraging people's active involvement in sport, community recreation, fitness, outdoor recreation and other physical activities.³

Many businesses also contribute to the promotion of sport and the support of elite athletes - 22,700 businesses sponsored sport in 1996-97, injecting \$282m into sporting events, clubs, teams and individuals.⁴ There are economic benefits for these and other businesses and the community at large through a diverse range of commercial activities, including the manufacture and sale of clothing and equipment, attendance at sports events and associated tourism.

Involvement in sport

In the 12-month period to the end of March 1997, the Involvement in Sport survey showed that 4.7 million people (32% of all people aged 15 years and over) were involved in playing or organising a sport on at least one occasion (table S5.1). Over 4.1 million people (29%) had played a sport, and 1.7 million (12%) (many of whom were also players) were involved as coaches, referees, administrators or in some other non-playing capacity.

S5.1 INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT - 1993 and 1997

Type of involvement	1993		1997	
	Number '000	Participation %	Number '000	Participation %

Players	3,963.6	29.1	4,115.2	28.5
Paid	57	0.4	142.6	1.0
Unpaid	3,906.5	28.7	3,972.6	27.5
Non-players(a)	1,419.7	10.4	1,655.9	11.5
Paid(b)	166.1	1.2	203.9	1.4
Unpaid	1,253.6	9.2	1,452	10.1
Players and non-players(c)	4,504.9	33.1	4,669.8	32.4
Paid	213.3	1.6	328.5	2.3
Unpaid	4,291.6	31.6	4,341.3	30.1

(a) Includes players with non-playing involvement.

(b) Refers to those who received some payment for their non-playing involvement only.

(c) Persons who are involved both as players and non-players are counted only once.

Source: Unpublished data, 1993 Involvement in Sport Survey; Involvement in Sport, Australia, 1997 (6285.0).

The 1997-98 Survey of Sport and Physical Activities recorded even higher participation rates. This survey included social sports and physical activities, but excluded running, jogging or walking when it was not organised by a club or association. In 1997-98, 48% of persons aged 18 and over had participated, as a player, in a sport or physical activity on at least one occasion over the previous 12 months.

Irrespective of the measure used, participation rates were substantially higher for men than women and for young adults than older people. Using the broader measure of participation from the 1997-98 survey, for instance, participation rates among men declined from 78% for those aged 18-24 to 25% for those aged 65 years and over, while among women they declined from 64% to 19% for the equivalent age groups.

Recent trends

Over the short period for which comparative figures are available (1993 and 1997), levels of participation in sport as a player remained much the same (about 36% for men and 22% for women, as measured by the Involvement in Sports surveys - see table S5.2). However, some small changes are apparent. This was particularly so among women in the 25-34 and 35-44 year age ranges, where their levels of participation in sport fell by about two percentage points. Against this trend, small increases appear to have occurred in participation rates among older men and women.

S5.2 PROPORTIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN PLAYING SPORT - 1993 and 1997

1993

1997

Type of involvement	Men	Women	Men	Women
Age group (years)	%	%	%	%
15-24	55.5	39.4	57.9	40.0
25-34	42.5	28.1	42.7	25.7
35-44	32.3	20.7	32.8	17.6
45-54	25.0	14.8	25.2	14.3
55-64	21.1	14.5	23.2	14.8
65 and over	20.3	12.2	22.2	12.9
Total	35.3	23.1	35.7	21.5
	'000	'000	'000	'000
Total playing sport	2,382.1	1,581.5	2,536.4	1,578.8

Source: Unpublished data, 1993 Involvement in Sport Survey; Involvement in Sport, Australia, 1997 (6285.0).

A notable change, among players in particular, has been the increase in numbers of people being paid for their involvement in sport. In 1997, 142,600 people were paid for playing a sport, compared with 57,000 in 1993. The number of paid players as a proportion of all players (3.5% in 1997) has nonetheless remained quite small. The number of paid non-players also increased, but to a lesser extent - an increase of 37,800 to a total of 203,900 people in 1997.

Popular sports and physical activities

The level of involvement in particular sports varies greatly by the age of the players, and although most sports are played by both men and women, some sports, such as cricket and netball, are much more likely to be dominated by one gender group. A feature of children's involvement in sport, apart from having much greater participation than adults, is that they are more likely to play a team sport requiring larger numbers of players. The opportunity that team sports provide for teaching social skills and the convenience of arranging group activities for children, who have comparatively large blocks of free time, are likely to be among the main reasons for the difference.

Sports played by children

In 1996-97, 61% of children aged 5-14 (1.6 million altogether) had played a sport organised by a club, association or school in the previous 12 months. As with adults, boys (65%) were more likely to have participated than girls (57%). For the large majority of children who had played an organised sport (87%), it had been organised by a club. However, 34% of children involved in an organised sport had participated in a school-organised sport out of school hours.

Taking boys and girls together, the two most popular organised sports among children in 1996-97 were swimming and basketball (331,900 and 235,500 participants, respectively) with netball (233,700 participants - dominated by girls) and outdoor soccer (228,800 participants - dominated by boys) following closely behind (table S5.3). The most popular organised sport among boys in 1996-97, with 208,600 participants, was outdoor soccer. Other football codes, including Australian Rules and to a lesser extent Rugby League (183,700 and 84,400 participants), were also popular. Cricket (outdoor - 165,200) was the third most popular organised sport played by boys. Dancing and gymnastics ranked among the six most popular organised sports for girls, with 133,500 and 57,500 participants, respectively.

S5.3 MAIN ORGANISED SPORTS PLAYED BY CHILDREN(a) - 1996-97

Sport/Activity	Players ('000)
BOYS	
Soccer (outdoor)	208.6
Australian Rules football	183.7
Cricket (outdoor)	165.2
Swimming	154.1
Basketball	152.9
Tennis	104.5
GIRLS	
Netball	220.7
Swimming	177.7
Dancing	133.5
Tennis	99.3
Basketball	82.6
Gymnastics	57.5

(a) Children aged 5-14 years.

Source: Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, Australia, 1996-97 (4177.0).

Sporting activities among adults

As with children, swimming was the most popular sporting activity among adults (those aged 18 years and over). In 1997-98, 1.6 million adults (12%) had been for a swim on at least one occasion during the year (84% of whom had been for a swim on more than 6 occasions) (table S5.4). Swimming ranked among the most popular sports for all age groups, although aerobics/fitness was equally popular with those aged 18-34 (both 18%), and golf ranked as the most

commonly played sport among adults aged 45 years and over with 8%, followed by swimming (7%).

S5.4 ADULT PARTICIPATION IN MAIN SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES(a) - 1997-98

Sport/Activity	Players ('000)
MEN	
Golf	873.7
Swimming	732.8
Aerobics/fitness	503.0
Fishing	477.2
Tennis	463.6
Cycling	407.3
Billiards/pool/snooker	242.6
Cricket (outdoor)	229.4
Surf sports	225.0
Tenpin bowling	220.7
WOMEN	
Swimming	896.0
Aerobics/fitness	876.2
Tennis	474.2
Netball	285.8
Golf	242.5
Cycling	218.6
Tenpin bowling	217.3
Fishing	164.3
Horse riding	154.2
Billiards/pool/snooker	130.5

(a) Refers to persons aged 18 years and over.

Source: Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, Australia, 1997-98 (4177.0).

Overall, with 1.4 million participants, aerobics/fitness was the second most popular sporting or

physical activity with adults in 1997-98. This was followed by golf (1.1 million participants) and tennis (937,800 participants).

For men, the most popular sports were golf (873,700 participants), swimming (732,800) and aerobics/fitness (503,000). While no single code of football was among the top ten sports and physical activities undertaken by men, a total of 660,900 men played some form of football. Outdoor soccer was the most popular code, with 199,700 participants, followed by Australian Rules with 152,900. Touch football (147,100) was more popular than Rugby League (86,600) and Rugby Union (41,400).

For women, swimming and aerobics/fitness were by far the most popular physical activities, with 896,000 and 876,200 participants respectively. Other popular sports for women were tennis (474,200 participants) and netball (285,800).

Masters' sports

Older people who have enjoyed competitive sport at younger ages are often keen to maintain or renew their active involvement by competing with their peers. The Australian Masters' Games is a multi-sports festival for mature-aged people conducted biennially in various locations throughout Australia. Ownership of the Games is held in trust by the Confederation of Australian Sport (CAS). Competition in a variety of sports (51 in Melbourne in 1995 and 39 in Canberra in 1997) is usually offered in five-year age spans, starting at 30 and continuing into the 90s. While the number of participants in Masters' Games increased substantially over the decade to 1997, average ages remained fairly constant, indicating an increase in participants over all ages (table S5.5).

The success of the Masters' Games reflects the wider participation in Masters sports by mature-aged people. Growth in the number of sports providing participation was most rapid in the 1980s, when 44 more sports were included on top of the 17 that had started between 1950 and 1979. Reports from many sporting bodies to the CAS indicate that Masters is the fastest growing area in their sport, in terms of numbers of participants.⁵

S5.5 AUSTRALIAN MASTERS' GAMES, Number of Players and Average Ages - 1987 to 1997

Year held	Venue	Players no.	Men years	Women years
1987	Tasmania	3,695	50	49
1989	Adelaide	7,415	46	45
1991	Brisbane	5,957
1993	Perth	5,759	46	44
1995	Melbourne	10,479	47	44
1997	Canberra	8,811	47	43

Source: Confederation of Australian Sport 1987-97, Australian Masters' Games Final Reports.

Time and other costs

Sport and exercise take up time and often cost money. Results from the 1997 ABS Time Use Survey indicate that an average of 21 minutes each day is spent on sport or physical exercise (excluding fishing) by people aged 15 years and over, if all people in this age group are included. If limited to those who participated, however, considerably more time was allocated to these activities - on average, 1hr:14mins each day. According to the 1996-97 Survey of Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, an average of \$693 was spent over the year by each participant in organised sport on membership and weekly fees, clothing and equipment, and other related expenses.

Employment status of players

While unemployed people may have more time for recreational activities such as sport, it is also likely that they are less able to afford the expense of organised sporting activities. Employed people were more likely to participate in sport (60% of men and 54% of women) than those unemployed (50% and 46% respectively) (table S5.6).

S5.6 PARTICIPATION IN SPORT, By Employment Status(a) - 1997-98

Employment status	Men %	Women %
Employed	60.4	53.6
Full-time	60.4	53.9
Part-time	60.5	53.2
Unemployed	49.6	45.9
Not in the labour force	30.8	29.6
Total	52.6	43.0

(a) Persons aged 18 years and over.

Source: Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, Australia, 1997-98 (4177.0).

Men and women who were not in the labour force were the least likely to play sport, with only 31% and 30% participating, respectively. However, many in this group would have been older retired people, who are less likely to play sport than younger people.

State and Territory differences

Differences in levels of participation in sport and physical activities in different parts of the country are in part affected by the age profiles of those populations, but other factors such as climate and life-style preferences of individuals may also be important. These differences can be observed between the States and Territories. In 1997-98, residents of the Australian Capital Territory (aged 18 and over) recorded the highest participation rate (64%). New South Wales and South

Australia, on the other hand, recorded the lowest participation rates (both 45%). The biggest difference between the participation of men and women was in the Australian Capital Territory (72% and 56% respectively) (table S5.7).

S5.7 PARTICIPATION IN SPORT, By State/Territory(a) - 1997-98

State/Territory	Men %	Women %	Persons %
New South Wales	50.4	39.3	44.7
Victoria	50.9	44.3	47.5
Queensland	56.0	45.6	50.8
South Australia	50.0	40.4	45.1
Western Australia	55.7	48.1	51.9
Tasmania	57.2	43.9	50.4
Northern Territory(b)	56.5	45.7	51.0
Australian Capital Territory	71.5	55.7	63.6

(a) Persons aged 18 years and over.

(b) Figures for the Northern Territory refer to mainly urban areas only.

Source: Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, Australia, 1997-98 (4177.0).

Reasons for discontinuing sport

People may discontinue one sport and take up another, or they may give sport up altogether. Also, with increasing age, fewer people engage in physical activities. The most common reason for giving up a sporting activity, among the 1.8 million people who reported having discontinued an organised activity during the two years prior to 1996-97, was lack of time. Men (31%) were more likely to give lack of time as a reason than women (24%) (table S5.8). With 228,800 people saying that they had a sports-related injury in 1995⁶, it is not surprising that the presence of injury or health problems was also commonly stated as the reason for discontinuing a sporting activity (21%).

S5.8 MAIN REASON FOR DISCONTINUING ORGANISED SPORT(a)(b) - 1996-97

Reason	Men %	Women %
No time/too busy	30.9	23.7
Injury/health problems	20.7	20.8
Moved away from club	13.9	8.6

Lost interest	10.3	10.2
Too expensive	6.8	10.7
Change in employment	3.8	2.7
Child care problems	0.5	3.5
Other/don't know	13.2	19.7
	'000	'000
Total discontinuing sport	909.0	903.7

(a) Persons aged 18 years and over.

(b) During the previous two years.

Source: Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, Australia, 1996-97 (4177.0).

Although women were more likely than men to discontinue an organised sport or physical activity because of child care problems, only a small proportion (3.5%, or 36,600 women) gave this as a reason.

Non-player involvement in sport

In the 12 months to March 1997, 13% of males and 10% of females aged 15 years and over had been involved in sport as non-players. The most common type of non-playing involvement was as a coach, instructor or teacher, with 628,300 people (4%) acting in this capacity (table S5.9). Almost as many (605,800, or 4%) were members of a committee.

S5.9 NON-PLAYING INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT(a) - 1997

Type of involvement	Number '000	Participation rate %
Coach/instructor/teacher	628.3	4.4
Referee/umpire	456.8	3.2
Committee member	605.8	4.2
Administrator	266.5	1.8
Other involvement	569.9	3.9
Total non-playing(b)	1,655.9	11.5

(a) Persons aged 15 years and over.

(b) Figures may not add to total as some people may have more than one type of non-playing involvement.

Source: Involvement in Sport, Australia, 1997 (6285.0).

Only a small minority (10%) were paid for their non-playing involvement, mostly for coaching

(41%) or refereeing (31%). Non-playing involvement in sport was most common for persons aged 35-44 years, with a participation rate of 18%. This group includes many parents who are likely to be involved in supporting their children's sporting interests (see **Australian Social Trends 1997**, 'Voluntary work', pp. 109-112).

Attendance at sporting events

Australians enjoy watching sporting events. According to a survey conducted by the ABS in November 1997⁷, sporting programmes were the most commonly watched on television after news and current affairs programmes, and were viewed regularly by over half of all Australians aged over 18 (55%). As well as watching sporting events on television, attending sports events (such as club matches and international competitions) is also a popular pastime.

During the 12 months ended March 1995, 6.2 million people, (44% of all people aged 15 and over), had attended a sporting event (excluding junior and school sport). Men (52%) were more likely to have attended than women (37%). For both men and women, attendance rates were highest for the 15-24 age group (63% and 55% respectively) and steadily declined with age. Among men aged 65 and over, the attendance rate was 28%, while for women in this age group it was 15%.

The most popular spectator sport was Australian Rules football, almost 1.9 million people having attended this sport on at least one occasion during the year (table S5.10). Horse racing (1.7 million), Rugby League (1.5 million) and cricket (1.2 million) were also among the most popular spectator sports.

S5.10 ATTENDANCE AT SELECTED SPORTING EVENTS - 1995

Sporting event	Persons '000	Attendance rate %
Australian Rules football	1,874	13.3
Horse racing	1,701	12.1
Rugby League	1,462	10.4
Cricket	1,166	8.3
Basketball	692	4.9
Harness racing	600	4.3
Soccer	559	4.0
Motor sports	452	3.2
Tennis	432	3.1
Rugby Union	358	2.5
Netball	312	2.2

Source: Sports Attendance, Australia, 1995 (4174.0).

Sydney 2000 Olympic Games

The largest sporting event in the world, involving both the largest numbers of participants and spectators, is the Olympic Games conducted every four years, almost continuously, since 1896. At the 1996 Games (in Atlanta, USA) 8.4 million tickets were sold to spectators⁸ and 10,744 athletes participated.⁹ Billions of people all over the world viewed the games live through satellite broadcasts to their television sets.

The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games will be held between the 15th of September and 1st of October 2000. Up to 10,200 athletes from 200 countries are expected to take part in 28 sports, and around 5.5 million tickets are expected to be sold.¹⁰ The Australian team is expected to have nearly 700 athletes, and over one million Australians are expected to attend the games.

The Paralympics will be held between 18th and 29th of October 2000 and will involve more than **4,000 athletes from 125 countries**.

Endnotes

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- 3 Sport and Recreation Ministers' Council (Australia) 1997, **Active Australia: A National Participation Framework**, Australian Sports Commission, Canberra.
- 4 Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999, **Business Sponsorship, Australia, 1996-97** (4144.0).
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- 6 Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998, **National Health Survey: Injuries, Australia, 1995** (4384.0).
- 7 Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998, **Public Attitudes to the Arts, Australia, November 1997** (4157.0).
- 8 Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games 1997, **The Official Report of the Centennial Olympic Games: Planning and Organizing**, vol. 1, Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers.

- 9 International Olympic Committee 1996, **Results of the Games of the XXVI Olympiad, The Centennial Games**, IOC, Lausanne.
- 10 Official Sydney Olympics site, <http://www.olympics.com/eng/>

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